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ABSTRACT

The Parenting Alliance Inventory (PAI) was administered to 186 mothers and 75 fathers with a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds who had at least one child between 2 and 6 years of age. Subjects were recruited from child care facilities, pediatric practices, and public recreational facilities in central Virginia. Extrafamilial child caregivers provided ratings of each child's adjustment. In addition to the PAI, parents completed the Parenting Stress Index, Parents Attitude toward Child Rearing, Revised Marital Adjustment Scale, Preschool Behavior Rating Scale (PBRS), and the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale. The child care providers completed the PBRS and the Behavioral Academic/Self Esteem Scale. Findings suggest that the scale is unidimensional and internally consistent; is not biased on the social desirability of the items; and exhibits concurrent and predictive validity. An examination of the pattern of correlations among variables based on gender revealed some notable differences. One consistent finding across gender was that parenting stress had a significant negative correlation with the perceived strength of the parenting alliance. It is concluded that results of this initial evaluation of the PAI are positive and suggest that the PAI measures the parenting alliance. Replication of the results with a larger sample is necessary before the validity and utility of the measure can be established. (RH)

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The Development of a Measure of the Parenting Alliance

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Introduction

Theory and research has suggested that the quality of the marital relationship is related to child outcomes. While postulating this association Belsky (1984) and Belsky & Herzog (1986) have found minimal evidence to demonstrate the impact of couples' marital adjustment in normal families on child outcome using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). On the other hand, marital discord in families which have experienced a divorce has repeatedly been linked to negative child outcomes (Emery, 1982); Hetherington, 1979; Emery, 1988). The Parenting Alliance Inventory (Abidin, 1988) was developed using the definition of the parenting alliance proposed by Weissman and Cohen (1985) as a guide.

The components of a sound parenting alliance suggested by Weissman and Cohen consist of:

1. Each parent is invested in the child;
2. Each parent values the other parent's involvement with the child;
3. Each parent respects the judgment of the other parent;
4. Each parent desires to communicate with the other.

It is hoped that the parenting alliance as measured by the Parenting Alliance Inventory will demonstrate the impact of that component of the parents' relationship on child outcomes. The parenting alliance, it is thought, can sustain marital infidelities, the sexual dysfunction of the couple, interest and values conflicts, and a host of other marital problems without the inevitable outcomes of dysfunctional parenting and child maladjustment. In an age in which the divorce rate is 50%, it is reasonable to assume that in those situations and in large numbers of troubled but still married families, the parents can continue to cooperate with each other in providing care and guidance to their children.

Method

The Parenting Alliance Inventory (PAI) is a 30 item self report measure which uses a five point Likert scale for responding. The scale was administered to 186 mothers and 75 fathers with a wide range of SES backgrounds who had at least one child between 2 – 6 years of age. The sample included 19% minorities. Extrafamilial childcare providers provided ratings of the child's adjustment. The families were recruited from childcare facilities, pediatric practices, and public recreational facilities in Central Virginia. In addition to the PAI, the parents completed the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1986), Parents Attitude toward Child Rearing (PACR) (Easterbrook & Goldberg, 1984); Revised Marital Adjustment Scale (RMAT) (Locke & Wallace, 1959), Preschool Behavior Rating Scale (PBRS) (Caldwell & Pianta, 1987), Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MC) (Crowne & Marlowe, 1980). The childcare provider completed the PBRS and the Behavioral Academic/Self Esteem Scale (BASE) (Coppersmith & Gilberts, 1982) in relation to the target 2 – 6 year old.

Results and Conclusions

The responses of mothers and fathers were analyzed using a MANOVA and a significant gender difference was not found. The mothers' and fathers' data was pooled to conduct a factor analysis. The results suggest that the scale is essentially unidimensional. Factor #1 accounted for 55% of the variance, Factor #2 at 6%, and Factor #3 at 4%. The three factors are congruent with three of the four dimensions of the parenting alliance suggested by Weissman and Cohen (1985) [see Table 1]. The Alpha reliability for the gender pooled data was .97, which indicates that the scale is internally consistent, which in the context of a unidimensional factor structure suggests a good narrow band measure according to Holden and Edward's (1989) criteria [see Table 2]. The PAI displayed a pattern of correlations with the other measures which would support its concurrent and predictive validity (see Table 3). The PAI was uncorrelated ($r = .01$) with the Marlowe-Crown Scale of Social Desirability, which suggests that the PAI is not subject to bias based on the social desirability of the items. The relatively low correlation of the PAI to the RMAT suggest that both measures are relatively independent and are likely measuring different aspects of the family. The PAI displayed a pattern of correlations with the other measures which would support its concurrent and predictive validity [see Table 3].

An examination of the pattern of correlations among variables based on gender revealed some notable differences, e.g., 1) the quality of the father's parenting alliance was more strongly correlated with his marital satisfaction than for mothers (.44 vs. .20); 2) the Fathers' PAI score was significantly correlated to the warmth of his parenting style ($r = .38$, $p = .001$), while for mothers, the scores were uncorrelated ($r = .13$).

Conflicted parenting styles in mothers were significantly negatively correlated to their perceived parenting alliance. One consistent. finding across gender was that parenting stress had a significant negative correlation with the perceived strength of the parenting alliance. It would appear that the presence of a strong parenting alliance serves to reduce parenting stress, although it is possible that lower parenting stress results in a stronger parenting alliance. It is noteworthy that maternal attachment was unrelated to the strength of the parenting alliance for mothers, but there was a strong relation to the parenting alliance for fathers. It would appear that fathers who are unable to connect with their partners are unable to connect with their children. For mothers, who traditionally serve as the primary caregivers of young children, the independence of the parenting alliance and maternal attachment is understandable. This relation may help to explain the finding that child adjustment and competence as perceived by either parent or the extrafamilial childcare provider [see Table 4] is related to the FPAI and not the MPAI.

The results of this initial evaluation of the PAI are positive and suggest that the PAI does appear to measure the parenting alliance. Replication of the current results on a larger sample is necessary before the validity and utility of the measure can be established.

Table 1. Three-factor principal components solution (Varimax rotation) for PAI for the total sample (N=261).

Factors & Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Factor 1 (Teamwork/Respects the Other's Judgment)			
PA21	.75	.37	.13
PA29	.75	.42	.20
PA25	.72	.45	.27
PA23	.71	.40	.28
PA20	.69	.42	.14
PA26	.67	.50	.18
PA7	.67	.08	.36
PA13	.67	.58	.16
PA8	.65	.28	.24
PA12	.63	.34	.35
PA28	.63	.49	.17
PA30	.60	.48	.10
PA24	.59	.51	.27
PA22	.58	.40	.20
PA9	.58	.35	.28
PA6	.56	.26	.40
PA14	.55	.17	.29
PA5	.53	.12	.52
Factor 2 (Values the Other Parent's Involvement)			
PA19	.32	.79	.15
PA18	.29	.75	.24
PA15	.40	.69	.13
PA11	.32	.64	.35
PA10	.35	.62	.33
PA17	.44	.60	.38
PA27	.50	.58	.21
PA1	.19	.54	.39
Factor 3 (Believes in the Other Parent's Confidence in Them)			
PA3	.18	.17	.85
PA4	.25	.18	.75
PA2	.11	.31	.71
PA16	.36	.21	.60

Table 2. Alpha reliabilities for the Parenting Alliance Inventory for the three groups: total sample (N=261), mothers (N=186), and fathers (N=75).

Alpha Reliabilities	Alpha
Combined	.97
Mothers	.97
Fathers	.96

Table 3. Selected correlations between the Parenting Alliance Inventory and the mothers' and fathers' independent variables.

	Mothers		Fathers	
Independent Variables	**MPAI**	**FPAI**	**MPAI**	**FPAI**
	N=186	N=75	N=	N=
PAI	—	.50¥	.50¥	—
RMAT	.20¥	.25†	.02	.44¥
RFPA	−.24‡	−.29‡	−.37¥	−.29‡
ATTM	−.13	−.37¥	−.33‡	−.32‡
RELN	−.45¥	−.18	−.36¥	−.39¥
PSICD	−.21†	−.26†	−.23†	−.24†
PSIPD	−.25‡	−.33‡	−.27†	−.26†
PSITOT	−.26‡	−.33‡	−.27†	−.27†
CONFLT	−.18	−.20	−.28‡	−.04

(significance levels: † = .05 ‡ = .01 ¥ = .001)

PAI = Parenting Alliance Inventory
RMAT = Revised Marital Adjustment Test
RFPA = Child Reinforces Parent (PSI subscale)
ATTMT = Parent Attachment (PSI subscale)
RELNT = Relationship with Spouse (PSI subscale)
PSIPD = Parenting Stress Index Parent Domain
PSICD = Parenting Stress Index Child Domain
PSITOT = Parenting Stress Index Total Score
WARM = Warm Parenting Style (PACR subscale)
STRICT = Strict Parenting Style (PACR subscale)
CONFLT = Conflict (PACR subscale)

Table 4. Correlations between the Parenting Alliance Inventory and the dependent variables for the total sample (N=261).

Independent Variables	MPAI	FPAI
MCOMPTNC	.07	.25†
MPOSADJ	.10	.25†
MMARCRON	−.03	.11
MIDENPIE	−.33¥	−.32
MROLES	.27‡	.19
FCOMPNTC	.20	.32‡
FPOSADJ	.23†	.27†
FMARCRON	.21†	.18
FIDENPIE	.25†	−.02
FROLES	.36‡	.18
TCOMPTNC	.04	.21
TPOSADJ	.15	.27†
TBASE	.20†	.29†
TCPSCS	.06	.32‡

(significance levels: † = .05 ‡ = .01 ¥ = .001)

(prefaces: M= Mother; F=Father; T=Teacher/Childcare Provider)

COMPTNC = Competence (CBRS subscale)
POSADJ = Positive Adjustment (CBRS — Pianta & Caldwell)
MARCRON = Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale
IDENPIE & ROLES = Identity Pie & # of Roles in Indentity (Cowan, et al.)
BASE = Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem (Coopersmith & Gilberts)
CPSCS = California Preschool Social Competency Scale (Levine, Elzey & Lewis)

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